

# Chemicals in the Workplace – Legal Requirements\*



Chemicals are used at work for cleaning purposes, as lubricants, and as solvents, etc. The procurement, storage, usage, and disposal of chemicals at work is controlled by numerous federal, provincial, and municipal laws. Workplace Hazardous Material Information System (WHMIS) and Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) are two federal requirements adopted and enforced by the provinces for handling chemicals in the workplace.

## Why is it important?

These laws are in place to ensure the safe use, storage and disposal of chemicals and their related hazardous waste. WHMIS provides Safety Data Sheets (SDS), education and training so workers can safely use and store chemicals. The TDG Act and its regulations provide requirements for proper transportation, signage, paperwork, and training so chemicals can be transported safely by road, rail, sea, and air.

## Associated risks/hazards

Chemicals pose a wide variety of hazards to workers, the workplace, and the environment. Depending on the chemical, they can be corrosive, they can cause health effects such as the inability to breathe, cancers, and dangers to the nervous system. If they are improperly stored in the workplace, chemicals can also cause fires, explosions, and the release of toxic gases. Chemicals and their hazardous waste can also impact the environment, by contaminating nearby waterways, affecting wildlife and plants.



## Preventive next steps

The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (OHSR) in British Columbia outlines the requirements for WHMIS. Workplaces that deal with any chemicals need to have a WHMIS program in place. This includes the provision of education and training on WHMIS for all workers.

WHMIS education and training covers:

- What are the elements of the WHMIS program?
- The major hazards of the hazardous products used in the workplace.

- You rights and responsibilities?
- The requirements for labels and SDS?
- The procedures for the safe use, handling and disposal of hazardous products?
- The emergency procedures involving hazardous products?

For the transportation of hazardous products and/or hazardous waste, there are federal and provincial laws in place. British Columbia has mostly adopted the federal TDG laws. These laws outline the requirement for signage, paperwork, and training.

Workplaces in BC also follow laws set out by the BC Environmental Management Act, which specifically deal with issues of reporting spills from the workplace and/or while transporting hazardous products/waste.

Depending on how hazardous products/hazards waste is that is being transported by land, sea, rail, or air, you must get specific TDG training. These TDG courses have an expiration date while WHMIS education and training do not.



## For additional resources visit:

[BC Government website](#) Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG)

[Occupational Health and Safety Regulation Part 5](#) Chemical Agents and Biological Agents

[WHMIS online course](#)

# Toolbox Talk

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